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Agriculture Department Purchases Apples and Beans for Food Assistance Programs

Purchase creates a boost to those who have suffered losses in recent years

WASHINGTON – Sens. Carl Levin, D-Mich., and Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture will purchase 27.9 million pounds of fresh apples and 9.9 million pounds of dry edible beans for child nutrition, needy family, and other domestic food assistance programs. Earlier this year, the Agriculture Department agreed to the Senators' request to purchase apples and other specialty crops for nutrition programs, hoping to assist apple growers who have lost an estimated \$760 million over the past three years, and other farmers who have suffered substantial losses.

"West Michigan's apple growers have been hit hard in the last few years due to adverse weather conditions and unfairly-priced apple imports," said Levin. "Bean farmers have also struggled due to the adverse weather conditions. The purchase by the Department of Agriculture will stimulate the Michigan economy and help apple growers and bean farmers get back on their feet." Levin added, "Additional apples and beans will now be available for people who participate in food assistance programs, such as children who take part in the School Lunch Program."

"These purchases by the USDA will provide nutritious, wholesome food for use in many important initiatives, including the school lunch program," said Stabenow. "This is also good news for Michigan's specialty crop farmers, who represent the backbone of the state's agricultural economy."

Last year, Congress passed the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000 which provided the Department of Agriculture with \$200 million for the purchase of apples and other specialty crops adversely affected by low prices in 1998 and 1999 and, further, directed the USDA to ensure that purchases made with the funds do not displace purchases by the USDA under any other law.

Further information about today's announcement is available from the Commodity Procurement Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/cp/>.

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